

Week 6: Contentment is not Complacency

NCAC Adult Sunday School

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THE TREASURE OF CONTENTMENT

What is Christian Contentment? Erik Raymond defines Christian contentment as “the inward, gracious, quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God’s providence.”

We might say that Christian contentment is a “happy peace” or a “joyful trust” in God, which gladly rests in God’s good and wise plan for our lives and which flows out of treasuring Christ above all else that this world has to offer.

But, there’s a potential danger in encouraging Christians to be content in that it could lead to us thinking that we should just sit back, relax, and simply watch life go by, without ever trying to do anything to improve life for ourselves or for others—which is definitely **not** what God expects of us!

THE BIBLE WARNS AGAINST COMPLACENCY

*“For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the **complacency** of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.” (Pr. 1:32-33)*

*“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and **prosperous ease** [carefree ease—NASB; unconcerned—NIV], but did not aid the poor and needy.” (Ezekiel 16:49)*

*“At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are **complacent**, those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.’” (Zephaniah 1:12)*

*“Because you have raged against me and your **complacency** has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.” (Isaiah’s proclamation against Hezekiah for his lack of concern for God and His ways, Isaiah 37:29)*

“We can look at spiritually tragic situations and barely respond; we can see significant sin patterns in ourselves and others and not be moved; we can walk by homeless people in large cities and barely glance their way. Clearly something is wrong, even still, with our hearts. **Christian contentment does not excuse these dead responses.** Christian contentment is not complacency!” (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, p. 173)

HOW IS CONTENTMENT DIFFERENT FROM COMPLACENCY?

Merriam-Webster defines **contented** as “feeling or showing satisfaction with one’s possessions, status, or situation” and **complacency** as “self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.”

| (Christian) Contentment | Complacency |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Accepting what God has done or is doing | Settling for less than what God calls us to |
| Wisely accepting what we <i>cannot</i> change | Foolishly refusing to act responsibly |
| Trusting that God is working all things for good | Resignation to the status quo |
| Embracing the redemptive work of trials | Avoiding challenges and hard work |
| Moving forward with zeal and trust in God | Idleness due to a lack of faith or purpose |
| Results from treasuring Christ above all things | Results from treasuring a life of ease |
| With godliness, will result in great gain (1 Timothy 6:6) | Will result in calamity and ruin (Proverbs 1:32) |

“Contentment leads us to trust that our Father has our best interests at heart and that His wisdom so far exceeds our puny understanding that we refuse to nurture a grumbling spirit. Rightly understood, contentment is not opposed to professional ambition, lament over suffering, or the drive to change one’s circumstances. Paul’s ambition was to reach Spain, he lamented personal loss in multiple letters, and surely he would have preferred to be loosed from his chains. Yet while in prison he displayed a quiet trust in God’s good plan for his life.” (*Trevin Wax, “Enrolling in the School of Contentment”*)

WE MUST REMAIN ZEALOUS ABOUT OUR OWN SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Even while knowing contentment in Christ, Paul continually displayed a drive to be conformed to the image of Christ. He yearned to overcome indwelling sin and live for the glory of Christ. We should be driven by this same zeal, always dependent on God’s grace, but always aiming at Christlikeness.

“¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” (Philippians 3:12-16)

What evidence do you see (in these verses or elsewhere) that Paul is not at all complacent regarding his personal holiness?

At the same time, where do you see (in these verses or elsewhere) that Paul is able to display Christian contentment even as he pursues personal holiness?

"The greatest men and women in the history of the church have been conspicuously passionate about relentlessly pursuing personal holiness. In them was no sense of spiritual lethargy or prideful overconfidence. They mortified sin by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13); they lived 'self-controlled, upright, and godly lives' in this present evil age (Titus 2:12)...this is in no way a life of colorless drudgery, of ascetic slavery with no pleasure at all. **Rather, it's a life that fits perfectly with true Christian contentment, a life of finding true pleasure in God alone.**" (*Davis, The Power of Christian Contentment*, pp. 177-178)

WE MUST REMAIN ZEALOUS ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

The Church is the Bride of Christ. Paul modelled for us the need to be people who are concerned with the health of the church, the maturity of the church, the holiness of the church, the growth of the church, the unity of the church, and the witness of the church.

"And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:28, after mentioning several ways that he had suffered while serving Christ)

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3)

"³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ...⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ..." (Philippians 1:3-6, 9-10)

What evidence do you see (in these verses or elsewhere) Paul is not at all complacent regarding the state of the church?

At the same time, where you do see (in these verses or elsewhere) that Paul is able to display Christian contentment even while being concerned about the state of the church?

"Churches most satisfied in God will be the most *dissatisfied* with their own spiritual state. They want to see God's name magnified throughout their city and around the world. They will be dissatisfied—filled with holy discontent over the current state of their church, and **they'll be yearning to reach more for Christ, to do more for others, to serve more in his name...**we want people who are satisfied with God but dissatisfied with the state of the world because they live and breathe the mission." (*Trevin Wax, "Beware the Satisfied Church"*)

WE MUST REMAIN ZEALOUS ABOUT THE ADVANCE OF CHRIST'S GOSPEL

Given the many millions of people who have never heard the Gospel and the thousands of people groups that remain unreached, we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent about the advance of the Gospel. A driving force in Paul's life was his concern that others come to know Christ as he did.

"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel..." (Acts 20:24)

"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:10)

What evidence do you see (in these verses or elsewhere) Paul is not at all complacent regarding the advance of the Gospel?

At the same time, where do you see (in these verses or elsewhere) that Paul is able to display Christian contentment even while pursuing the advance of the Gospel?

"Far from quenching burning zeal for holiness and for the spread of the gospel by a worldly lethargy, genuine Christian contentment protects that fire from being extinguished by adversity. There can be no advance in either personal holiness or evangelism/missions without suffering. If we have not learned the secret of being content while that road gets extremely steep, we will give up." (Davis, *The Power of Christian Contentment*, p. 183)

WHAT NOW?

- Determine to be a contented Christian who is characterized by a joyful trust in God. Resist any tendency to grumble or complain. Give thanks often—for *all* things.
- Study Philippians. Look for all the ways Paul displays contentment and all the ways he displays a passion for Christ and His Kingdom. Ask God to develop such a heart in you.
- Make a list of everything for which you are discontent. Ask God how you should think about each area. For each, consider how you can strive for contentment in a way that glorifies God.
- Spend time with God each day—ideally before your day really gets going. Ask God to help you grow in your love for Him, that you might delight in Him above all else this world offers.
- Spend time with people who are able to display a joyful contentment in Christ even when circumstances are difficult. Read missionary biographies. Study the Persecuted Church.
- Turn your focus outward and seek the good of others: Get involved in ministry. Go out and share the Gospel. Serve someone in need. Give generously. Pray for God's blessing on others.